

Social and Affordable Housing for Young People

Submission from Youth Affairs Council Victoria
to the 10-Year Social and Affordable
Housing Strategy

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Youth Affairs
Council Victoria

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector in Victoria.

Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

Cover design: Briar Rolfe



YACVic respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this continent. We pay our respects to the ancestors and Elders past and present of all Aboriginal nations in Victoria.

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Why Young People?

A large proportion of the homeless population in Victoria is young people aged 12-25, but this cohort is poorly supported by the current social housing system. The 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy is an unmissable opportunity to prevent youth homelessness by ensuring young people can access social and affordable housing.

The Youth Homelessness Crisis in Victoria

Victoria is in a youth homelessness crisis. Over 6,000 young people experience homelessness on any given night.¹ They are couch surfing, bouncing between short term rentals, renting overcrowded or unsafe properties, sleeping in their car or sleeping on the street. Young people are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness as people of other age groups.² Despite making up only 16 per cent per cent of the Victorian population, young people represent 26 per cent of people experiencing homelessness. Young people are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness than people of other age groups. The true number of young people experiencing homelessness is likely to be higher than ABS estimates because youth homelessness is often hidden.³

Negative Impacts on Young People

Experiencing homelessness has dramatic and long-lasting negative impacts on young people. Young people describe a sense of being left behind and how the instability has major impacts on all aspects of their lives.

Homelessness causes depression, anxiety and a low sense of self-worth.⁴ Young people experiencing homelessness are also more likely to disengage from education and employment.⁵ Without somewhere safe and secure to live, young people are at a greater risk of experiencing violence, poor nutrition, mental ill-health, unsafe sexual encounters, and substance abuse.⁶

Creating social housing that's accessible to young people will make a massive difference because it will be some sort of stability. The hardest thing for me has been constantly moving. It forms so much instability throughout all areas of my life and really disrupts study, work, my mental health and the ability to think of my future. Having a stable place to live would have the biggest positive impact.

Kirra from Melbourne

Needing a New Place to Live

Young people are often forced to find a new place to live but this, in itself, cause homelessness. Most of the young people YACVic has talked with cite domestic violence or relationship breakdowns as reasons they need to find a new place to live. Others moved from a rural town to a regional city or Melbourne to study or find work. Some young people we spoke with exited the care of the state (out-of-home care or the justice system) directly into homelessness. None of these issues are causes of homelessness. The real cause of homelessness is an acute lack of affordable housing for young people in both the private rental market and the social housing system.⁷ If housing was available, young people who need to find a new home would not be forced into experiencing homelessness.

Barriers to the Private Rental Market

In Victoria, many young people simply cannot afford to rent in the private rental market. Young people on income support payments while they study full time or look for work can barely afford to rent in the private market.⁸ Youth unemployment and underemployment are at record highs due to the COVID-19 related retraction of the economy, meaning thousands more young people are out of work or need more hours.⁹ The trend towards casualisation, especially of entry level positions, means more young people than ever before are financially insecure.

Young people graduating from high school and university are experiencing increasingly long delays before finding stable employment.¹⁰ The impacts of COVID-19 on young people's employment prospects are likely to be long-term. Evidence from previous recessions shows that young people's careers are scarred by recessions.¹¹ Low income support payments and youth unemployment and underemployment mean that many young people struggle to afford a home in the private rental market when they need to find a new place to live.

I'm working as well, but I'm lucky to even get \$200-300 extra on top of my Centrelink from what I get from work. People think that just because you have a job you're not homeless. Well, it's not like that. And I lost my last job because we couldn't afford to keep the house.

Penny from Warrnambool

No-one will hire me, so that's why I'm on Centrelink, so it's shit. Centrelink doesn't give me enough money to be able to rent.

Alicia from Warrnambool

Young people face structural and systemic barriers to accessing the private rental market. Young people also told us about discrimination they have experienced when applying for properties in the private rental market. Young people have short or non-existent rental histories so are seen by rental providers (landlords) and agents as higher risk. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as well as migrant and refugee young people tell YACVic that they experience racism and discrimination when attempting to access the private housing market. While some young people can rely on parents to co-sign leases, many young people, especially those who are forced out of home, have limited support to apply for and secure private rentals. Some young people in small regional towns described how their family name is infamous because of their relatives' actions, so their applications for rentals are automatically rejected by property managers. Young people are at the beginning of their careers and working in entry-level jobs, but when applying for rental properties, must compete with older applicants who have higher incomes.

It's a small town so landlords know who you are.

Gerry from Warrnambool

When you apply to a rental, doing that form online, there are so many questions and a lot of it is quite invasive and doesn't give you a chance to explain. 'Have you rented before? Did you get your bond back?' For me the answer is 'No' because I was living with shitty people who trashed the place. It's not my fault and it's easy for me to say that. Whereas an agent is going to look at that be like 'Oh well, they're a risk, we're not going to approve them for a house'.

Peter from Melbourne

Systemic Exclusion from Social Housing

The current social housing system fails to effectively support young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This is primarily due to the lack of social housing properties. In Victoria, 6,000 new homes need to be built each year for the next decade to meet the national standard of social housing stock.¹² This means that even once the Big Housing Build is complete, Victoria's social housing stock will be 3.46 per cent of all dwellings – trailing the current national average of 4.5 per cent.¹³

In addition, while 26 per cent of the homeless population in Australia are young people, only 3.1 per cent of social housing properties are leased to young people across Australia.^{14, 15} Young people seeking their own social housing lease are seen as less lucrative than families, as the cost of social housing rent is based on the income of all tenants and can include Family Tax Benefit payments.¹⁶ Exact data on the number of young people in social housing as head tenants in Victoria is limited, but given Victoria's relative lack of social housing, it is likely that the proportion of social housing leased to young people in Victoria is even lower than the Australia-wide figure of 3.1 per cent.¹⁷

When young people apply for social housing, they join the end of a lengthy social housing waitlist.

Young people have been told to expect to wait between seven and ten years for a property to become available, even if they are currently experiencing homelessness or are moving away from a situation of domestic violence. Many young people do not continue with their application because of the extended wait times, instead attempting to break into the private housing market. Young people experiencing homelessness are concerned about how they will survive the next weeks and months, not planning up to 10 years ahead.

I constantly had to move places. It made me feel alone and neglected. I had to focus on where I was going to sleep next week. I couldn't think about school or work or anything.

George from Melbourne

Concerningly, YACVic has heard from young people that a pathway to moving more quickly up the waitlist is to become pregnant:

You should have a baby. They move you up then. I got a two bedroom before the baby came.

Carrie from Mildura

Young people in rural and regional Victoria identify that there are very few social housing properties in their area.

Everybody should get their own house with all the facilities and services that they deserve. There just isn't enough social housing here. And there's definitely nothing in the smaller towns. So even if there were enough houses in Warrnambool, people would have to travel away from their school, their family, their friends.

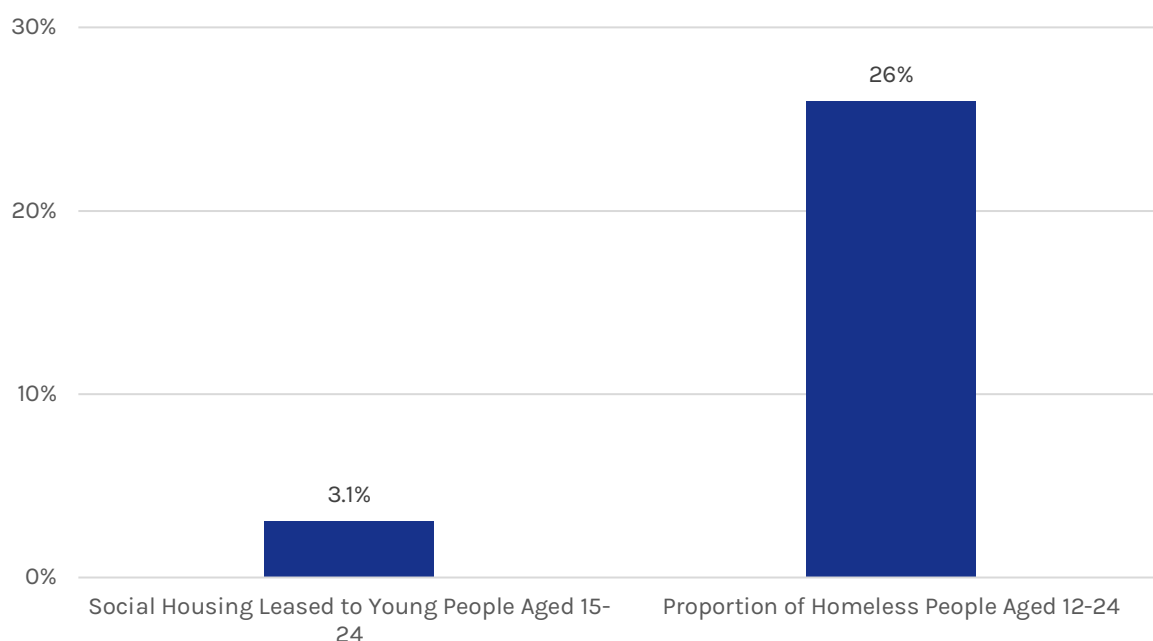
Sam from Warrnambool

Recommendation 1:

Proudly identify young people as a priority cohort when designing and delivering social and affordable housing. Commit to removing existing barriers to young people accessing social and affordable housing.

Economic Impact and Opportunity

Meaningfully addressing youth homelessness through social and affordable housing will generate economic benefits for the entire community.¹⁸ The cost of health and justice services for young people experiencing homelessness exceeds \$745 million annually – which is more than the cost of homelessness accommodation and services for all age groups.¹⁹ Developing youth-specific social and affordable housing would greatly reduce this cost in the long term, by helping young people to exit homelessness rapidly.²⁰ With stable housing, young people experience better health outcomes and are less at risk of entering the justice system, reducing demand for health services. Involving young people in the design of youth-specific social and affordable housing will ensure that the Strategy offers suitable, stable and economically efficient housing options for young people.



A comparison of the proportion of social housing leased to young people and the proportion of homeless people in Australia aged 12-25

Youth Voice and Participation

For the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy to effectively support young people, it must engage meaningfully with them as stakeholders, not just clients. Elevating young people's voices, ideas and lived experience will generate the best results for the whole community. Homes Victoria must implement models of youth participation to ensure young people are meaningfully involved in the design and delivery of the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.

Youth Participation and Co-Design

The design and delivery of social and affordable housing in Victoria requires the genuine participation of young people. A social and affordable housing system developed using co-design processes that meaningfully value diverse lived experiences will be more successful.

Successful co-design with young people requires a commitment to sharing responsibility and decision-making roles. This process empowers young people and all other stakeholders to learn from each other and collectively create the best outcome. YACVic, among many other organisations and academics, has developed a model of youth participation that would benefit the 10-Year Strategy. YACVic's model emphasises empowerment, purposeful engagement and inclusiveness.²¹

The community has a responsibility to ensure that young people are included in the development of the social and affordable housing system. Article 12 of the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that young people have the right to participate and contribute to decision making processes that affect them.²² The use of co-design principles to ensure that young people are involved in the development of systems is consistent with this obligation.

Involving young people in shaping the 10-Year Strategy does not end with the endorsement of the Strategy by the Government. Young people should be engaged throughout the life of the Strategy to determine priorities, take part in decision-making processes, continue providing a lens of lived experience and connecting priorities to the experiences of communities. Best practice for young participation includes having young people involved in governance and evaluation. This ongoing engagement of young people in the process will ensure that the Strategy effectively responds to the unique needs and preferences of young people using social housing over the 10-year timeframe.

Benefits of Lived Experience

Lived experience is a vital asset to all project development and delivery. People with lived experience bring a unique and important perspective to design, decision-making and governance processes that cannot be captured in any other way. Consulting with stakeholders and service-users is a step towards embedding lived experience but is no replacement for meaningful involvement of young people with lived experience throughout the length of the initiative.

Youth participation is about meaningfully working with young people as equals. Not putting us in a separate room, over there where we don't have any power. Having lived experience doesn't mean that we know everything, but our different perspective on the issue is very important.

Kirra from Melbourne

Involving young people with a diverse range of lived experiences will lead to a better Strategy. Consider engaging with young people with a variety of lived experience. Each perspective has something valuable to contribute to the Strategy. At minimum, Homes Victoria should involve young people who:

- have previous or current experience of homelessness, in any of its forms;

- have applied for social housing and are currently on the waiting list;
- have attempted to apply for social housing and have not progressed with their application due to the expected long wait times;
- have previously lived in social housing as a lead tenant or as a child/dependent of an older tenant; and
- currently live-in social housing as a lead tenant or as a child/dependent of an older tenant.

Recommendation 2:

Meaningfully involve young people in the design, delivery, governance, monitoring, and evaluation of the Big Housing Build and the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy through the following actions:

- a) Support young people with diverse lived experience to be members of all reference groups and decision-making bodies, equally alongside other stakeholders
- b) Establish a specific youth reference group, made up of young people with diverse lived experience, to provide advice to Homes Victoria, the Minister for Housing, other consultative groups, builders, architects and other stakeholders.

Housing for Young People

For social and affordable housing to work for young people, the Victorian Government and Homes Victoria must build enough homes to end the waitlist. Until that point, some adjustments to the existing system will enable young people to access support from social and affordable housing.

Growth to Fully End the Waitlist

YACVic and young people welcome the commitment to build 12,000 new social housing properties through the Big Housing Build, and the 'Growth' Focus Area of the discussion paper. The new properties built under the Big Housing Build will substantially reduce the length of the social housing waiting list but are not enough to meet demand. The existing commitments in the Big Housing Build will provide just one fifth of the number of properties that is required to bring Victoria up to the national average of social housing properties. To address youth homelessness, substantial commitments are needed to grow social housing stock to permanently end the waiting lists.

Build more houses, the waiting list is so long! They could build specific houses designed for young people and designed with young people. They could have a quota system so some of the houses are especially for young people and can't be for anyone else. Then young people will stop missing out.

Kirra from Melbourne

By the time young people reach the top of the waitlist, they have experienced nearly a decade of insecurity and trauma, interrupting their transition to adulthood. Addressing young people's exclusion from social housing requires a commitment to building far more than 12,000 homes. YACVic endorses the Coalition of Housing Peaks' call for the Victorian Government to build 60,000 social housing properties within the next 10 years.²³

Recommendation 3:

Set a target for ongoing growth of social and affordable housing to meet demand and end the waitlist. Build at least 6,000 properties per year for at least the next 10 years.

Physical Features and Location of Housing for Young People

Young people have already identified the features necessary for social housing to work for them, in consultations with YACVic and other organisations.²⁴ Young people require housing that responds to their situation and that contributes to their stability, enabling them to focus on their studies or work.

Young people suggest that social housing should be near public transport, which reflects the downward trend of young people having a driver's license.²⁵ Many young people experiencing homelessness have had their education disrupted, so new social housing developments should enable easy access to education including, but not limited to, high schools, alternative high schools, TAFEs and universities. Similarly, social housing developments should enable access to workplaces, especially workplaces with entry level jobs. Young people experiencing homelessness in rural and regional Victoria expressed to YACVic that the best housing for them would be located locally, so they can continue being involved in their local communities and have consistency in support services. Young people experiencing homelessness expressed to YACVic that they aim to rent in the private market and want to see social housing as a pathway to reach that goal. Social housing tenures must respond to the individual circumstances of young people by enabling flexibility as required by the young person. Young people, like all tenants in social housing, should be supported to stay in social housing as long as they need.

Recommendation 4:

Implement young people's existing recommendations on the most important features of social and affordable housing, including, but not limited to:

- a) near public transport
- b) near education options (high schools, alternative high schools, TAFEs, universities)
- c) with access to green open spaces
- d) with access to workplaces, including workplaces with entry level positions
- e) with access to communal areas and facilities like barbeques, parks and playgrounds
- f) located in local communities throughout Victoria.

Diversity of Housing Types to Meet Demand

A contributing factor to young people's exclusion from social housing is the mismatch of property types to applicants. Many young people YACVic has spoken with apply for social housing as a single individual. These single applicants are not readily considered for most social housing properties which have two or more bedrooms. The small number of single-bedroom properties mean young people simply miss out. As one young woman who had experienced homelessness in Melbourne, before moving home to Warrnambool and continuing to experience housing insecurity there, argues:

For a long time, I wanted to live by myself in a house, but it just wasn't possible. Make sure there's social housing for single people.

Carla from Warrnambool

Recommendation 5:

Build housing with a diversity of configurations, including a substantial number of single bedroom properties, to enable single young people to access social housing.

Public and Community Housing to Enable Proper Supports

Some young people who need social housing require targeted supports and services to have a stable tenancy. Young people who experience homelessness are highly likely to have experienced some form of family or domestic violence, relationship breakdown or traumatic experiences.²⁶ Nearly every young person who has experienced or is experiencing homelessness with whom YACVic has spoken has experienced some form of family violence or abuse.²⁷ Ongoing support for these young people is vital to ensuring their wellbeing and a successful, sustainable tenancy.

Some young people experiencing homelessness have complex needs that require intensive supports and flexibility in tenancy arrangements, such as rent relief when tenants go through periods of financial hardship.

These young people may be excluded by mainstream community housing providers who are under pressure to be financially sustainable. These young people are best supported in public housing, not community housing. Both public and community housing both fall under the umbrella of social housing, but each has different funding and delivery models. The public housing sector can prioritise the wellbeing of young people with complex needs over the pressure to be financially sustainable where community housing providers cannot. The public housing sector can resource and integrate targeted supports and provide flexibility of rental payments.

Recommendation 6:

Deliver a diversity of homes through both public and community housing sectors that specifically meet the needs of young people who have experienced trauma, young people with complex needs and young people with behaviours of concern. Pair the provision of housing with the delivery of ongoing, long-term and targeted support.

Evidence Driven Developments

Future social and affordable housing initiatives must be driven by evidence of demand. The existing sources of data on demand for homelessness services and affordable housing each have strengths and limitations when measuring youth homelessness. The complex and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on young people's financial and housing security are not yet fully known, so ongoing data collection and responsive social housing developments are necessary.

Various sources of data could be used by Homes Victoria to inform decisions about new social housing projects. These data sources include the social housing waitlist, information from specialist homelessness services and statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Each of these data sources has strengths and limitations when measuring the need for social housing.

As already explored, young people who need social housing are likely to be underrepresented in the social housing waitlist because many do not proceed with their application because of the long wait times. Specialist homelessness services, especially youth-focussed services, collect data on people who request support whether the service can provide that support or not. The ABS found that most people who had experienced homelessness in the past ten years (67%) did not approach services for assistance during their most recent episode of homelessness.²⁸

This finding suggests that there is significant need for homelessness services and low-cost housing that is not captured in data collected by specialist homelessness services. YACVic expects that young people are likely to be overrepresented in the cohort of people who did not approach services because of a general lack of awareness, stigma or ability to navigate the system. Data from the 2016 Census shows that at least 6,000 young people experience homelessness in Victoria on any one night, representing 26 per cent of the whole homeless population.²⁹ However, the ABS recognises that their methodology for estimating youth homelessness is limited and is likely to underestimate the real figure.³⁰

Recommendation 7:

Ensure sources of evidence used to make decisions about type, location, volume and target cohorts for social housing effectively capture the data and experiences of young people.

Review the Community Housing Funding Model

The community housing industry and system requires review and regulation to ensure young people can access community housing equitably. In the current system, community housing providers are indirectly disincentivised from providing housing to young people.³¹ Under pressure to be financially sustainable, community housing providers are likely to prioritise housing for people older than 25 because they are more financially lucrative tenants.

Community housing providers charge rent as a proportion of a tenant's income support payment and this rent supports the financial viability of the organisation. Young people are more likely to be on lower income support payments than older people. Youth Allowance is up to \$150 less per fortnight than JobSeeker, and young people are less likely to be receiving other income support payments like Family Tax Benefit.³² Given the existing commitments to growth in the social housing sector is largely concentrated in community housing, not public housing, regulatory changes are needed to ensure young people can access community housing equitably.

Recommendation 8:

Review the community housing model to both:

- a) incentivise community housing providers to lease to young people by subsidising rent payments of people on lower income support payments like Youth Allowance; and
- b) allocate funding for community housing providers to build homes for young people, through either a specific funding round or quotas for young people in all initiatives.

A Co-ordinated Response to Youth Homelessness

Social and affordable housing sit within a mesh of other initiatives that aim to address youth homelessness. A co-ordinated approach to delivering all of these initiatives will ensure that all young people are adequately supported.

Young people who have experienced homelessness identified four solutions to ending youth homelessness in Victoria that YACVic captured in the 2020 report *Ending Youth Homelessness: The Solutions from Young People*. The solutions are:

1. Create a fair private rental market that works for young people
2. Commit to an urgent and ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list
3. Properly support young people at risk of experiencing homelessness
4. Immediately raise the rate of income support payments

Since that report was released, the Victorian Government has moved towards three of those actions. Recent changes to renting rules through the Residential Tenancies Act Amendment 2018 will make the private rental market safer and fairer for young people. The final report of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness makes specific recommendations about improving and expanding supports available to young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.³³ The 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and the Big Housing Build align with young people's second recommendation but will only work for young people if each of the recommendations made in this submission are implemented.

Together, the initiatives listed above have the potential to end youth homelessness. Each initiative requires co-ordinated action from multiple sectors to be successful. Actors as diverse as private landlords, real estate agents, specialist homelessness providers, youth services organisation, community services organisations, local governments and various branches of the Victorian Government are involved in delivering programs, developing policies and enforcing legislation which address youth homelessness. A collaborative and co-ordinated approach to youth homelessness would align these activities and actors to ensure that young people have the best chance of being supported.

Recommendation 9:

Establish a high-level housing forum through which relevant Ministers, departments, local governments, community housing providers, specialist homelessness services, community services organisations (youth, mental health, alcohol and other drug, family violence), tenant advocates, the private sector and, most importantly, young people with lived experience, work together to co-ordinate all responses to youth homelessness and identify methods of ongoing collaboration.

Addressing Stigma

Social housing projects are a target for stigmatisation due to overwhelmingly negative media reporting and historical under-investment in social housing maintenance and neighbourhoods. Stigmatisation can lead to reduced social and employment opportunities for residents.³⁴ It also impacts on the wellbeing of social housing tenants.³⁵

In YACVic's consultations, young people identified the negative impacts of stigma around social housing. One young woman who lived with an older family member in social housing reflected on the experience:

It wasn't really a safe environment, not good for young people. There was lots of stigma there. Ideally, social housing is somewhere safe, an environment that you want to be in. It needs to support young people on their recovery journeys.

Kirra from Melbourne

Even young people who are currently experiencing homelessness, some of whom have applied for social housing, identify stigma associated with social housing. Young people argue that stigma is worse in small towns in rural and regional Victoria because 'everybody knows you'.

Reduce the stigma by not putting all the homeless people in one place. Don't put a big neon sign above it

Jess from Warrnambool

Young people clearly identify that existing models of social housing are targets for stigmatisation. They argue that building smaller projects, dispersed throughout the community is one option of reducing stigma. Ongoing maintenance of social and affordable housing properties and a concerted public-facing campaign on the benefits of social housing would also contribute to reducing the stigma.³⁶

Recommendation 10:

Reduce the stigma of social and affordable housing and support thriving communities by:

- a) Building or buying properties geographically dispersed throughout communities
- b) Committing to ongoing maintenance of social housing properties
- c) Working with local communities and local governments to deliver projects that respond to place and are enmeshed within communities. Support local governments to foster connections between housing providers, local services and local communities
- d) Initiate and resource an awareness campaign, meaningfully involving people with lived experience, on the benefits of social and affordable housing for residents and communities.

Apprentice Hours for Young People

The 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and the Big Housing Build is an unmissable opportunity to create employment opportunities for young people across the state, during a time of massive youth unemployment and underemployment. YACVic welcomes the Government's commitment to hiring apprentices, trainees and cadets on social housing projects. The Minister for Housing suggests that '10 per cent of the work on major projects to be done by apprentices, cadets, trainees, Aboriginal Victorians and women' while Homes Victoria suggests that only 'up to 10 per cent of all the hours worked on large projects' will be completed by apprentices, trainees and cadets [emphasis added].^{37, 38}

In Victoria, youth unemployment and underemployment remain high, and the economic impacts of COVID-19 is likely to scar the careers of this generation of young people for the remainder of their working lives.³⁹ Further, the capacity of the Victorian building industry is already under strain and experiencing rising demand due to federal government building and renovation grants.⁴⁰

A stronger commitment to apprentices, trainees and cadets on all projects across Victoria would address workforce capacity issues and youth unemployment and underemployment by providing good quality, meaningful jobs and career prospects for young people.

Recommendation 11:

Mandate that at least 15 per cent of hours on all projects completed under the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy are allocated to apprentices, trainees and cadets. This commitment should be separate from the welcome initiative of minimum hours for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and women.

Enforce and Expand the Vacant Property Tax

To meet the necessary demand for social housing, the government should raise revenue through broadening and strongly enforcing the Vacant Property Tax. Young people experiencing homelessness told YACVic that they regularly walk by empty houses and suggested taxing owners to raise necessary revenue to provide support. The Tax is collected by the State Revenue Office (SRO) from property-owners who leave their investment properties in certain postcodes of Melbourne empty. The Tax aims to deter landlords from willingly allowing a property to stay empty. However, the Tax relies on investors self-reporting empty homes and is not strictly enforced.⁴¹

Analysis of water usage in properties in Melbourne shows that 69,004 properties were vacant in 2019 which could have housed 185,000 people.⁴² Only 2.6 per cent of the properties that could be taxed had any tax applied, because the SRO relies on self-reporting and has no enforcement power. No fines have been levied against non-declaring owners. The Government could collect at least \$160 million per year from properly enforcing the Vacant Property Tax, which could be used to build at least 350 social housing properties, and/or act as an incentive for landlords to make their properties available for the very tight private rental market.⁴³

The Tax currently only applies to inner and middle Melbourne postcodes, but homelessness and the need for social housing exists in every postcode in Victoria.⁴⁴ Young people in rural and regional Victoria, especially in coastal holiday regions which are now experiencing massive increases in rental prices,⁴⁵ identified that many homes in their town are left deliberately vacant by owners, which directly impacts housing affordability. Broadening the Tax to apply across all of Victoria would help address the lack of housing across the state and/or raise resources necessary for the ongoing growth of social housing.

Recommendation 12:

Effectively enforce the Vacant Property Tax, and extend it to all Victorian local government areas, to incentivise availability of properties for the private rental market, and/or to raise revenue to fund more long-term growth of social and affordable housing.

The Case for Inclusionary Zoning

Legislating that all new developments must include a percentage of affordable and/or social housing units is an effective way to meet demand for social housing in Victoria. Young people who have lived experience of homelessness told YACVic that they want the government to implement inclusionary zoning laws to increase the availability of social and affordable housing. They talked about seeing major development projects increase the number of available rental properties in their suburb or town, only for all of the new homes be completely unaffordable on their incomes.

Inclusionary zoning schemes require new development plans to include a minimum number of affordable homes.⁴⁶ Inclusionary zoning schemes could be targeted such that a proportion of these affordable homes are reserved for priority groups, including young people. For example, in South Australia, the Inclusionary Zoning Scheme requires that new significant developments include 15 per cent affordable dwellings, 5 per cent of which are reserved for high needs groups.⁴⁷ This strategy has produced over 5,000 affordable housing properties in the past 10 years.⁴⁸

A commitment to inclusionary zoning through the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy in Victoria could also incorporate developer incentives such as tax concessions or fast-tracked planning approval to reward the inclusion of affordable housing in development plans.⁴⁹ This approach would generate greater investment in affordable housing and accelerate construction to meet demand.

Recommendation 13:

Incorporate an inclusionary zoning scheme which include specific targets for social and affordable homes for young people

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Proudly identify young people as a priority cohort when designing and delivering social and affordable housing. Commit to removing existing barriers to young people accessing social and affordable housing.

Recommendation 2:

Meaningfully involve young people in the design, delivery, governance, monitoring, and evaluation of the Big Housing Build and the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy through the following actions:

- a) Support young people with diverse lived experience to be members of all reference groups and decision-making bodies, equally alongside other stakeholders
- b) Establish a specific youth reference group, made up of young people with diverse lived experience, to provide advice to Homes Victoria, the Minister for Housing, other consultative groups, builders, architects and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 3:

Set a target for ongoing growth of social and affordable housing to meet demand and end the waitlist. Build at least 6,000 properties per year for at least the next 10 years.

Recommendation 4:

Implement young people's existing recommendations on the most important features of social and affordable housing, including, but not limited to:

- a) near public transport
- b) near education options (high schools, alternative high schools, TAFEs, universities)
- c) with access to green open spaces
- d) with access to workplaces, including workplaces with entry level positions
- e) with access to communal areas and facilities like barbeques, parks and playgrounds
- f) located in local communities throughout Victoria.

Recommendation 5:

Build housing with a diversity of configurations, including a substantial number of single bedroom properties, to enable single young people to access social housing.

Recommendation 6:

Deliver a diversity of homes through both public and community housing sectors that specifically meet the needs of young people who have experienced trauma, young people with complex needs and young people with behaviours of concern. Pair the provision of housing with the delivery of ongoing, long-term and targeted support.

Recommendation 7:

Ensure sources of evidence used to make decisions about type, location, volume and target cohorts for social housing effectively capture the data and experiences of young people.

Recommendation 8:

Review the community housing model to both:

- a) incentivise community housing providers to lease to young people by subsidising rent payments of people on lower income support payments like Youth Allowance; and
- b) allocate funding for community housing providers to build homes for young people, through either a specific funding round or quotas for young people in all initiatives.

Recommendation 9:

Establish a high-level housing forum through which relevant Ministers, departments, local governments, community housing providers, specialist homelessness services, community services organisations (youth, mental health, alcohol and other drug, family violence), tenant advocates, the private sector and, most importantly, young people with lived experience, work together to co-ordinate all responses to youth homelessness and identify methods of ongoing collaboration.

Recommendation 10:

Reduce the stigma of social and affordable housing and support thriving communities by:

- a) Building or buying properties geographically dispersed throughout communities
- b) Committing to ongoing maintenance of social housing properties
- c) Working with local communities and local governments to deliver projects that respond to place and are enmeshed within communities. Support local governments to foster connections between housing providers, local services and local communities
- d) Initiate and resource an awareness campaign, meaningfully involving people with lived experience, on the benefits of social and affordable housing for residents and communities.

Recommendation 11:

Mandate that at least 15 per cent of hours on all projects completed under the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy are allocated to apprentices, trainees and cadets. This commitment should be separate from the welcome initiative of minimum hours for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and women.

Recommendation 12:

Effectively enforce the Vacant Property Tax, and extend it to all Victorian local government areas, to incentivise availability of properties for the private rental market, and/or to raise revenue to fund more long-term growth of social and affordable housing.

Recommendation 13:

Incorporate an inclusionary zoning scheme which include specific targets for social and affordable homes for young people.

Conclusion

The real cause of homelessness is an acute lack of affordable housing for young people in both the private rental market and the social housing system.

YACVic welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment to social housing. The Big Housing Build and the 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy demonstrate that the Government is listening to the voices of young people experiencing homelessness.

Together, these initiatives can effectively address Victoria's youth homelessness crisis. YACVic strongly urges that the 10-Year Strategy includes a meaningful focus on young people and commits to embedding youth participation in all processes.

The recommendations made in this report must be implemented to ensure social and affordable housing works for young people. Without action now, thousands more young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness will continue to be locked out of social housing.

YACVic looks forward to working with Homes Victoria, the Victorian Government and, most importantly, young people, to ensure that Victoria's social housing works for young people.

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